

A STORY FOR
CHILDREN.

BY
CANNING WILLIAMS.



AT the time when Charlie Greenfinch witnessed the frolics I am about to describe, he had seen seven winters and eight summers, which is another way of saying that he was seven and a half years old. He was a healthy young Briton, and, like one or two other healthy boys of my acquaintance, was fonder of play than he was of his lessons.

Charlie liked nothing so well as a scamper with "Spot" on the sea-shore, which reminds me that I have to tell you that he lived at a seaside town. Spot was Charlie's dog: a white terrier with a spot on his face, which accounts for his name.

Charlie and Spot were the best of friends; but, whenever the boy got a scolding from his mother, he scolded the dog; and, whenever his father whipped him, he whipped poor Spot. As Charlie used to say, "Spot shares my fun and biscuits; it is only fair that he should share my scoldings and whippings also." But whether this was a right

argument or not, I will leave you to decide for yourself.

It was on a certain morning in August, after Charlie and Spot had tired themselves with romping on the sands, that the fishy frolics occurred. It was a hot day; so hot that all the little pools and puddles on the shore were obliged to send up steam in order to cool themselves. Spot, too, was sending steam out of his mouth; and Charlie himself was,

as he expressed it, "steaming hot." A steamer in the bay was letting off great clouds of steam, and a little steam launch was steaming so hard that Charlie thought it would burst its boiler; so he went into a small cavern that the sea had made at the foot of the cliff, sat down, and waited for the explosion. Spot lay at his master's side, and growled at some sea-gulls, that he would have caught if he could.

The cavern was a nice cool place, so, before the friends had been there many minutes, Spot, like a polite little dog, put in his tongue and ceased to send out steam; and Charlie, instead of thinking about the steam launch, thought of crabs, eels, and lobsters, and wondered whether they were having a good time at the bottom of the deep blue sea.

As everybody knows, boys and girls, and grown-up men and women too, can think much better when they rest their heads on their hands, with their eyes on the ground; so Charlie, who wanted to think very hard



"A NICE COOL PLACE."

about the crabs, eels, and lobsters, propped up his head with his arm, and gazed at the pebbles which lay around.

Now, I suppose the crabs, eels, and lobsters must have known that a little boy was on the shore thinking about them, or they would not have crawled out of the sea, and gone through a performance right in front of the cavern.

The crabs were the first to come out of the water. The father and mother crabs carried the baby crabs in their claws, and put them down on a large flat rock, whence they would be able to get a good view of the frolics, and be out of the way.

Then came the lobsters, who carried their young ones on their shoulders, and placed them on another big rock.

After the lobsters came the eels; but, as the little eels were strong enough to crawl by themselves, all the father and mother eels did for them was to arrange them in rows in the space between the rocks.

Then, after a lot of talking and running about, the lobsters and eels sat down together, while the crabs, mounted on their hind legs, played at leap-frog. Charlie, who had no idea that crabs were such excellent jumpers, watched the performance with great interest. The crabs played the game much the same as

we do, the only difference that Charlie saw being that those crabs who fell when leaping had to retire from the fun. This arrangement soon reduced the number of players until only two were left. But these two were splendid fellows, and each tried his hardest not to be beaten. First one and then the other stood as high as his legs would let him, but each cleared the other's head and alighted in the finest style. At last, however, one of them stumbled, and, though he tried his best to keep his feet, rolled head-over-heels on the sand. The victorious crab walked proudly up to his companions, and, like the little gentleman he was, made them a low bow when they clapped their claws in his honour.

The lobsters now entered the field. A dozen of them were told off to collect some long roots of seaweed which the sea had cast upon the beach. When this was done, the lobsters divided themselves into ten sets, each set consisting of two groups, and each group of five players.

"Ah!" said Charlie to himself, "I see



"LEAP-FROG."

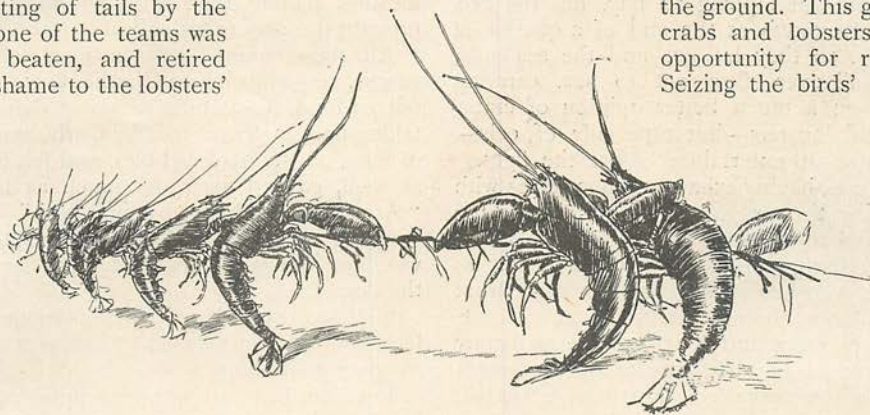
what it is: they are going to play at tug-of-war." And Charlie was right.

The lobsters lost no time in setting to work; and, my word, didn't they pull! The ropes of seaweed must have been tough, or they would not have stood the tugging. Now this side, and now that, gained a few inches, but they were all so well matched that what ground was lost one moment

was regained the next, and so the game went on.

Presently, however, amid a loud clapping of claws by the crabs, and a beating of tails by the eels, one of the teams was fairly beaten, and retired with shame to the lobsters'

themselves, which they did by winding themselves around the bodies of the birds, and squeezing them so hard as to make them gasp for breath and fall to the ground. This gave the crabs and lobsters a fine opportunity for revenge. Seizing the birds' legs in



"TUG-OF-WAR."

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quarters. This success was followed by another; the second by a third; the third by a fourth; and the fourth by a fifth. The remaining five sets, straining every muscle, and firmly digging their legs in the sand, tugged as never lobsters tugged before, when crack went the ropes, and the legs of fifty lobsters were kicking in the air!

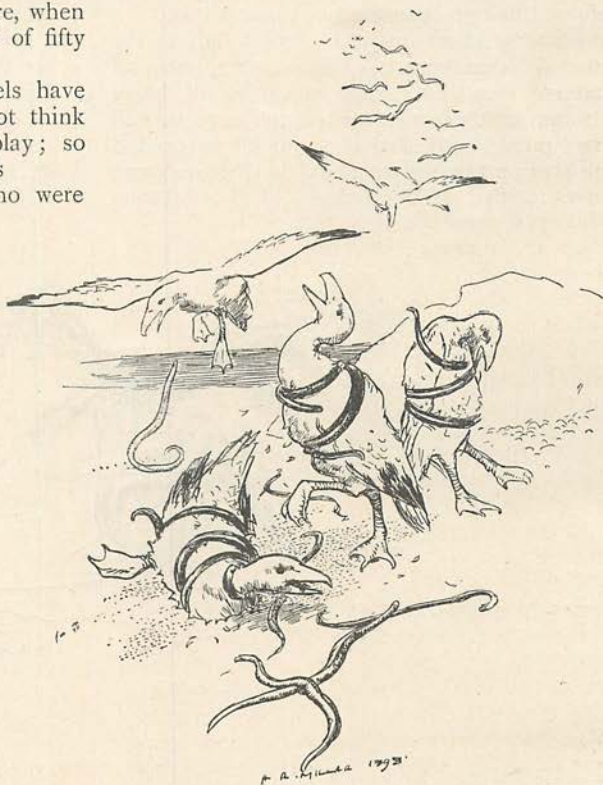
It was now the eels' turn. As eels have no legs or claws, Charlie could not think of any game at which they could play; so he closely watched their movements

So also did a score of sea-gulls who were perched upon the top of the cliff which overlooked the playground. Now, sea-gulls are not at all fond of sports and pastimes, nor do they like to see other creatures fond of them, so they swooped down from the cliff and ordered the crabs, eels, and lobsters to go back to the sea. This, however, they refused to do, whereupon the sea-gulls—who, as you know, have very strong and sharp beaks—began to peck at them. This made the crabs, eels, and lobsters angry, especially the eels, who, through having no hard shells on their backs, felt the pecks the most.

Eels, as a rule, are not much given to fighting, but on this occasion, their tempers being aroused by the sea-gulls, and their backs smarting from pecks, they showed that they were quite able to defend

their nippers, they nipped with all their might and main, and made the sea-gulls cry out for mercy.

As the birds began the fight, it was only



"THE EELS WERE QUITE ABLE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES."

fair that the others should end it, so the more the birds cried, the harder squeezed the eels, and the tighter nipped the crabs and lobsters. The crabs and lobsters could have gone on nipping all day, but the eels had had enough at the end of a quarter of an hour, so they let go, and the sea-gulls, aching all over, flew out to sea, carrying with them a much better opinion of crabs, eels, and lobsters—but especially of eels—than they had entertained before the fight.

The eels, having exhausted themselves with squeezing the sea-gulls, had to give up the fun they had intended to indulge in, which was as disappointing to them as it was to Charlie, who was very anxious to know what kind of game the eels could play at.

But the crabs and lobsters were so happy at having pinched the legs of the impudent sea-gulls, that they needs must have a football match in celebration of the affair.

At each end of the playground, two lobsters stood on their hind legs as goal-posts, and a large cork was used as a football. It was an exciting match, although the crabs, through being more active than the lobsters, had the best of it. At half-time—that is, when half the game was over—the crabs had scored five goals to their opponents' two.

After a short rest, the second half of the match commenced. The lobsters, who, of course, could not bear the idea of being beaten by the crabs, kicked the cork so well and ran so hard, that they quickly succeeded in scoring three more goals, making the game five to five. The success of the lobsters

made the crabs lose courage, and when a side, in whatever game, loses courage, that side usually loses the match. And so it was with the crabs; for, a few minutes later, the lobsters scored their winning goal, which brought the play to an end.

All these sports and pastimes were, of course, very amusing to Charlie, but dogs are not so fond of watching games as they are of taking part in them; so Spot, who was tired of lying on the hard pebbles, and felt hungry as well, gave a bark, as much as to say, "Aren't you ready to go home yet?"

Spot's bark made Charlie start, for, in watching the games, he had quite forgotten the dog.

"Halloa, Spot!" cried he, springing to his feet, and rubbing his eyes, "I think it is time we were going home."

But Charlie had no sooner stood up than he fell down (which was rather a funny way of going home), and made some most peculiar grimaces. The fact is, he had been so long in the cavern that he had got the "pins and needles" in his legs, which is an uncomfortable place for such things, as most boys and girls know.

"Why!" he exclaimed, yawning, "it is just as though I had been asleep; and yet I am *sure* I saw the football match, and the other things."

But when Charlie looked for the crabs, the eels, and the lobsters, they were not to be seen, for Spot's bark had sent them all back to their homes at the bottom of the deep blue sea!

